

BUSINESS AS MISSION IN LIGHT OF AUGUSTINIAN AND THOMISM THEOLOGY: COMMENDATIONS AND CRITIQUES

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In discussing business as mission, Richard Chewning concludes that “The CBFA has for the first time come face to face with a theological issue, not merely an issue regarding integration.” His article, *Augustine and Aquinas*, raises several important issues for Christian business people and faculty engaged in the business as mission arena. His basic thesis is that, whether people are aware of it or not, their theological presuppositions color their view of BAM (business as mission). It is hard to argue with that thesis. There are additional aspects of his paper that I appreciate. But there are also ideas that I find problematic. I will cover each of these in turn.

A VITAL CALL TO DEEPER THINKING

Given his prior seminal contributions to the integration of Christian and business thinking, it is not surprising that Chewning now calls scholars to more sophisticated levels of analysis. His emphasis on the history and development of Christian thought, long a staple in other disciplines, is long overdue in the field of business. Similarly, his attention to philosophy and theology are welcomed. Many Christian business scholars, myself included, often act as though all we need to integrate faith and the Bible in the twenty-first century is the Holy Spirit, our Bible, and our knowledge of business theory and practice. This is naïve at best, and dangerous at worst. I am grateful for Chewning’s call to the solid hermeneutical and theological awareness and grounding that many of our spiritual ancestors provide. This also is necessary for sound integration. So, too, is consideration of the basic relationship between faith and reason. For Christian scholars of all types, this issue is foundational. And it is one that Christian thinkers like Justin Martyr and Tertullian have been wrestling with, and disagreeing about, since the second century after Christ. At my insti-

tution, Gordon College, we frequently invoke Anselm’s famous phrase, “Faith seeking understanding” (Cowan & Guinness 1998, p. 90) to capture this pursuit. Personally, I have found the writings of Noll (2011) and Sproul (2000) particularly enlightening in deepening my understanding of the faith and reason tension. Augustine and Aquinas are certainly two Christian fathers with whom every thoughtful Christian should be familiar, including those in applied areas like business. Chewning is to be commended for reminding us of this.

Chewning is also to be applauded for the eight theological questions he poses at the end of his paper. These questions masterfully demonstrate the practical relevance of rigorous theological thinking. Proponents of BAM need to grapple with these questions. In particular, Christians need to take the call to evangelism very seriously. Further, business owners need to be extremely careful about evangelizing their employees. As Chewning wisely notes, an important power differential exists between owners/bosses and employees. This directly colors any discussions of faith initiated by an owner. Great care must be taken in all such interactions. Finally, Chewning’s attention to soteriology is appropriate given his interpretation of business as mission, although his is a view of BAM that I will question below.

A NARROW VIEW OF BAM

My first concern with Chewning’s *Augustine and Aquinas* is also a concern with the way “business as mission” has come to be framed. The way Chewning describes BAM reflects only one view of business as mission (which, itself, is one of the ongoing problems of the business as mission movement, i.e. the lack of consensus on the exact meaning of the term). Part of Chewning’s apparent concern with BAM may reflect this ongoing

definitional problem. One of the earliest definitions of BAM was produced at the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelism in Thailand in 2004 (Tunehag, McGee & Plummer)¹. The Lausanne Issue Group that produced this definition was very intentional about calling this new idea business as mission not business as missions. Around this time, I recall someone who was considering getting involved in BAM commenting emphatically that he would not be interested in the idea if it were business as missions. He had no problem with missions. Indeed, he was a strong advocate of Christian missions (i.e. missionary work), but his view was that business as mission (with the word mission in the singular) was something quite different.

The Lausanne statement, which is theologically grounded, differentiates business as mission from workplace ministry, tent-making, and business for missions. It presents business as mission as “business with a kingdom of God purpose and perspective” (Tunehag, McGee & Plummer 2004, p. 7) whose real bottom line is “*ad maiorem Dei gloriam*,” for the greater glory of God. Business as mission can involve traditional evangelism and missions activities, but it is so much more than that. Johnson (2009), in his exhaustive book, *Business as Mission: A Comprehensive Guide to Theory and Practice*, appreciates this more nuanced view of BAM. He presents the following as a working definition of BAM: “BAM is broadly defined as a for-profit commercial business venture that is Christian led, intentionally devoted to being used as an instrument of God’s mission (*missio Dei*) to the world, and is operated in a cross-cultural environment, either domestic or international” (p. 28). Interestingly, and I would add, problematically, although Chewning acknowledges Johnson as “the best definer of the BAM movement,” Chewning goes on to analyze a much narrower version of BAM: business as a form of missions work. Chewning seems to view BAM as another tool for evangelism, yet Johnson’s definition (as well as the Lausanne statement) does not embed BAM with that emphasis. It is true that many people frame BAM as merely a missions strategy, but this is an unfortunate distortion of the meaning of the word, mission.

Indeed, some have become so frustrated with this distortion as to abandon the term BAM altogether (e.g. Ewert 2006). For example, a group of 30 international leaders in theology, missions, business (practice and scholarship), NGOs, governmental agencies, and “BAM” (as more holistically defined) produced a short but powerful statement on what they preferred to call,

Business as Integral Calling (Wheaton Declaration 2009). The view of “business as mission” presented there might cause Chewning much less pause. It is a view that encourages doing business in a way that promotes the holistic flourishing of individuals and communities. As such it is not seen as a new way of doing business, but rather as the way God calls all Christians to do business. It is also consistent with Dyck & Neubert’s (2010) multistream management, Bretsen’s (2010) faithful business, and Alford and Naughton’s (2001) common good model of the firm. Evangelism is a component of these holistic approaches to business, just as it should be a component of every Christian’s life, but it is not the defining element of a business that seeks to further God’s mission on earth. In this view, business as mission is fundamentally concerned with *missio Dei* not missions.

A *missio Dei* approach to business as mission (singular) involves sharing the Gospel, but the Gospel that is shared is a theologically richer and more holistic Gospel (Ferguson, Wright & Packer 1988). Yes, the gospel is good news, but it is not just the good news that people can get right with God and enter heaven someday. The Gospel also refers to the coming of the Kingdom of God, a kingdom that is about love and mercy, shalom and justice (Luke 4:16-21). A kingdom where everything that is wrong in the world will be made right. Now that is good news! And that is the news Christians have to share. One way to share it is to use business as an instrument for love, mercy, justice, and shalom. It is also very good news to know that the Kingdom is near (Mark 1:14-15). No, it is not fully here yet, but it is well on its way, and believers are called to be agents of the change it brings. In the Lord’s prayer Christians are taught to pray: “Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” Christians are not called to wait until they die or until Christ returns to experience the Kingdom. They are to be at work right now helping usher it in. Business practiced as mission is one way to contribute to fulfilling God’s will on earth as it is in heaven.

Chewning argues that only people with the gift of evangelism should engage in formal missions. Fair enough. But many of his concerns might be alleviated were he to conceive of BAM as business as mission rather than business as missions. Not everyone is called to missions. But everyone is called to *missio Dei*, God’s mission.

A NARROW VIEW OF THEOLOGY

My other primary concern with Chewning's *Augustine and Aquinas* is its treatment of theology. This concern has multiple levels. First, while I am pleased that he has introduced theology into the discussion, I think he makes gross overstatements when he says, "Discussing theological distinctives has not been important [to the CBFA] until now" and "The CBFA has for the first time come face to face with a theological issue, not just an issue regarding integration." It is true that the CBFA has worked hard to avoid letting theological differences among its members become divisive. For this it is to be commended. But to say that the CBFA and JBIB have not engaged theological issues until now is off target. As long ago as 1997, a JBIB piece examined the theology of Kierkegaard (Vander Veen 1997), as but one example. A more recent example (and one that is especially relevant to Chewning's examination of the implications of theology for BAM), is Quatro's (2012) JBIB article, *Is BAM a Flawed Concept? A Reformed Christian Response to the BAM Movement*, which is thoroughly theological. It also is not the first time JBIB has published integration pieces from a Reformed theological perspective. Although not Reformed myself, I have appreciated those articles as well as others that have drawn on Anabaptist, Quaker, or Wesleyan theology. The JBIB not only accepts theological pieces, it promotes them. The official editorial domain of JBIB is depicted in the journal as the intersection of "Business Discipline" and "Scripture/Theology," not just Scripture.

A commonly used model among CBFA members is Niebuhr's (1951) typology of five stances that Christians have taken toward culture. These stances reflect Reformed, Lutheran, Anabaptist, liberal Protestant, and (some would argue) Roman Catholic theology. This typology of differing theologies has been used over the years to examine a variety of business issues from a Christian perspective. Personally, in addition to Niebuhr's typology, I have found Phillips and Okholm's (2001) book on the theological roots of contemporary American evangelicalism very helpful in articulating my own theological views. Certainly those views have directly impacted the conference presentations and published papers I have produced through the CBFA.

I also question Chewning's position that the theological ideas of Augustine and Aquinas are those that are most relevant to a current understanding of business as mission. Aside from the issue of whether Neocene-Thomism is best represented today by transcendental

Thomism or neoscholastic Thomism (Grenz, Guretzki & Nordling 1999), there is the more basic issue of the influence of Augustinian and Thomism theology on contemporary evangelicalism. Several authors (e.g. Noll 1995; Phillips & Okholm 2001) point to other theological traditions as more directly influencing evangelicals' thinking today. To say, as Chewning does, that Augustine and Aquinas are "still the two most dominant ... theologians in the twenty-first century Protestant Churches" seems to me to be overreaching. A claim like this requires greater substantiation.

Is the Augustine-Aquinas distinction the most important theological distinction for examining BAM? What about the ideas of reformers like Calvin, Luther, Arminius, and Menno Simons? Their theologies seem to be at least as directly relevant to BAM as well as very influential in shaping modern American Protestantism. As one example, the Reformed articulation of the *ordo salutis* differs markedly from the Roman Catholic, which is based on Augustinian and Thomism theology (Grenz, Guretzki & Nordling 1999). It is indisputable that Augustine and Thomas have influenced Christian thinking as much as anyone else. But I am not convinced that their theologies are the ones that are most relevant to BAM in the twenty-first century. Business as mission should invoke theological thinking. However, I believe the theology of the reformers mentioned above would prove more fruitful to believers wrestling with BAM today.

CONCLUSION

Chewning asks whether Christian business departments should introduce courses or majors in BAM. He also implies that this decision should not be taken lightly and should be based on sound theological reasoning. Not only do I have no quarrel with this, I applaud it. But I do question whether Chewning has chosen the best theological lenses for the task at hand, and I fully dispute that this is the first time the CBFA has encountered an issue that requires a theological response. I am also disappointed that business as mission continues to be defined so divergently and, in my opinion, too frequently in a way that strips the idea of its essential and transformational meaning.

ENDNOTES

1. The "BAM" movement is at least a decade old now. Another critique (separate from Chewning's paper) is why it took the CBFA so long to become seriously engaged with BAM, although I am aware of a confer-

ence paper on the topic as early as 2004 (Seibert & McFarlane, 2004), and it may well have been formally addressed even earlier than that.

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